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## Safety: Governor Signs Improved One Call Bill Into Law

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Contact: Sherri Goodman (mailto:sherri.goodman@energen.com) 205-326-1892

Gov. Bentley last month signed into law an amended one-call bill that improves public safety by removing calling exemptions for some entities and bolstering enforcement measures.

Under the revised law, governmental entities and railroads are now required to contact Alabama 811 prior to any planned or scheduled excavations that are not considered routine maintenance. This change also is expected to restore some federal grants to Alabama recently lost due to the exemptions in the prior law.

Alabama is laced with underground utility lines, and pipeline damage caused by third parties is not only a public safety hazard but is also a significant cost to Alagasco every year. The one-call law protects the public and excavators from injury or death, and it helps prevent property damage, environmental harm and loss of essential public services.

“Given the importance of safety to our utility operations, the revisions to the Alabama one call legislation are significant and will help improve communication among governmental entities, contractors and utilities regarding locating underground facilities,” said Alagasco President and Chief Operating Officer Dudley Reynolds.

Originally passed in 1994, the law is the result of a multi-year collaborative effort of numerous stakeholders working together through the Alabama Damage Prevention Alliance (ADPA).

The effort to improve the one-call bill was initiated with the strong support of the Alabama Public Service Commission and staff, including Gas Pipeline Safety Administrator Wallace Jones.

Alagasco partnered with the Commission, Alabama 811, other utilities, contractors, railroads and governmental entities to review the bill and craft revisions to improve public safety and meet federal guidelines. Other improvements include:

- Establishing standards for design and survey locate tickets which will benefit the construction and engineering industry in our state.
- Adding a civil penalty provision for misrepresenting an emergency excavation request.
- Allowing for prosecution of willful and malicious damage to utility facility marks as a Class C misdemeanor.
- Including a provision for the counties to be able to collect attorney's fees and court costs for any cases prosecuted. Fines for violating the law still go to the state's General Fund so this change does create some incentive for the counties to prosecute.



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*Gov. Bentley signed into law a revised one-call bill on April 16. The attendees from left to right are: Bram Fuller, USIC Locating Services ; Bob Gardner, Alagasco/Alabama Damage Prevention Alliance co-chair; Janice Hamilton, Alabama Public Service Commission; Annette Reburn, Alabama 811; APSC Commissioner Jeremy Oden; Ed Guy, Alagasco/Alabama 811 Board; Elizabeth Lawlor, Norfolk Southern; Sen. Gerald Allen, bill sponsor; APSC President Twinkle Cavanaugh; APSC Commissioner Terry Dunn, APSC; Wallace Jones, APSC; and Robert Patterson, Alabama Power/Alabama 811 Board.*